

**Dr Holly Chard**

### **“Give people what they expect”<sup>1</sup>: John Hughes’ family films and seriality in 1990s Hollywood**

This paper explores serial production strategies and textual seriality in Hollywood cinema during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Focusing primarily on the production and promotion of John Hughes’ family films, including the *Home Alone* series (1990-1997), *Dennis the Menace* (1993), *Baby’s Day Out* (1994) and *101 Dalmatians* (1996), I will examine how Hughes exploited the commercial opportunities offered by serial approaches to both production and film narrative.

As a writer, director and producer, John Hughes played a significant role in two major Hollywood production trends: the teen movie cycle of the mid-1980s, and the family film cycle of the early 1990s. From the late 1980s onwards, he adopted a production strategy that utilized many of the features of serial film production. Through his Chicago-based production company, Hughes Entertainment, he sought to control and, arguably, to standardize the production of his screenplays, capitalizing on his prolific output as a scriptwriter. Although he depended on several major Hollywood distributors for financing, Hughes found that by reducing his reliance on their facilities and avoiding the interference of studio executives he could ensure relatively fast turnaround times on his productions and respond swiftly to proven audience demand.

Hughes’ ability to both shape and react to audience demand at a textual level was a major factor in his success as a commercial filmmaker. Time and again, he showed an aptitude for creating films that replicated successful formulas from his previous box office hits. Accordingly, this paper will examine how Hughes’ family films of the 1990s negotiate the demands for familiarity and novelty. It will also reflect on how this interplay between repetition and innovation was discussed in promotional discourses and in critical responses to the films. Drawing on an extensive range of primary sources, including trade journals, newspapers and publicity materials, this paper will provide new perspectives on the significance and operations of seriality in New Hollywood cinema.

### **Biography:**

Dr Holly Chard is Lecturer in Contemporary Screen Media at the University of Brighton, in the UK. Her research focuses on the American media industries from the late 1970s onwards, with an emphasis on Hollywood cinema. She completed her PhD at the University of Sussex in 2014 and has drawn on her historical investigations of 1990s Hollywood cinema in several forthcoming book chapters and journal articles. Holly’s research interests include: histories of Hollywood cinema, family entertainment, popular music and ‘synergy’, teen-oriented media, stardom and celebrity, the politics of representation in film and television comedy, conceptualizing film authorship, and media historiography.

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<sup>1</sup>John Hughes, quoted by Tim Appello, ‘Varied Hughes’, *Entertainment Weekly*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1994.